

VZCZCXRO1760
RR RUEHIK
DE RUEHAA #0236 0551000
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 241000Z FEB 10
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUQC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4281
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 6284
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3956
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3815
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4528
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1497
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 4425
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 000236

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: SOCI PGOV TX
SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: ASHGABAT MUNICIPALITY FAILS WINTER TEST

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for Internet distribution

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: The shortcomings of Ashgabat's municipal services and emergency preparedness were vividly illustrated when a heavy snowfall hit the Turkmen capital on February 12. Icy roads crippled both public and private transport, creating additional difficulties for workers trying to get to and from work. Except for central areas and the route to the president's home, the rest of the city's roads were completely neglected. Particularly noticeable was the lack of public information about road conditions and public transport disruptions. As a test of the government's ability to communicate with the public in an emergency, the snowstorm showed there remains a lot of room for improvement.
END SUMMARY.

¶3. (SBU) On February 12, a heavy snowfall paralyzed life in the Turkmen capital. Temperatures dropped down below 14F at night and barely reached 32F during the day. Traffic was primarily affected by icy, slippery roads, which seldom occur in Ashgabat. The municipality appeared unprepared to react to the heavy snowfall. Apart from some central roads and roads along the president's route home, no other roads were cleared of snow or treated with salt or sand. Minor traffic accidents multiplied. Traffic police restricted access to some main arteries to avoid mass traffic accidents. This led to heavy congestion in the city center.

¶4. (SBU) Public bus transportation was crippled as many buses were inoperable due to their tread-worn tires. Since the public was not informed about the severe reduction in bus service, bus stops were full of people trying to get to work or school, and those few buses circulating in the city were packed. Private, usually ubiquitous, taxis were

difficult to catch since many taxi drivers also stayed off the slippery roads. Drivers that did pick up passengers grossly overcharged. An Ashgabat resident who lives in Mir district said that for a ride home from the city center during the storm cost 10 Manats (approximately \$3.50), while normally she pays only 2 Manats (\$.70). She said, "It was very difficult to catch a taxi, I spent an hour trying to get one, and then nearly another hour to get home, while usually it takes only 15 minutes for me to get home from work." The situation was even more difficult for those who live outside of Ashgabat.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: While snowstorms and blizzards like this one are not ordinary occurrences in southern Turkmenistan, no one is surprised when they do occur. The heavy snowfall of February 12 revealed the Ashgabat municipal authorities' lack of preparedness in the face of an extreme weather event. Especially noticeable was the government's failure to provide public information about road conditions and transport disruptions. In the event of other possible emergency situations, it is not likely that the government's response would be any more effective. END COMMENT.

CURRAN